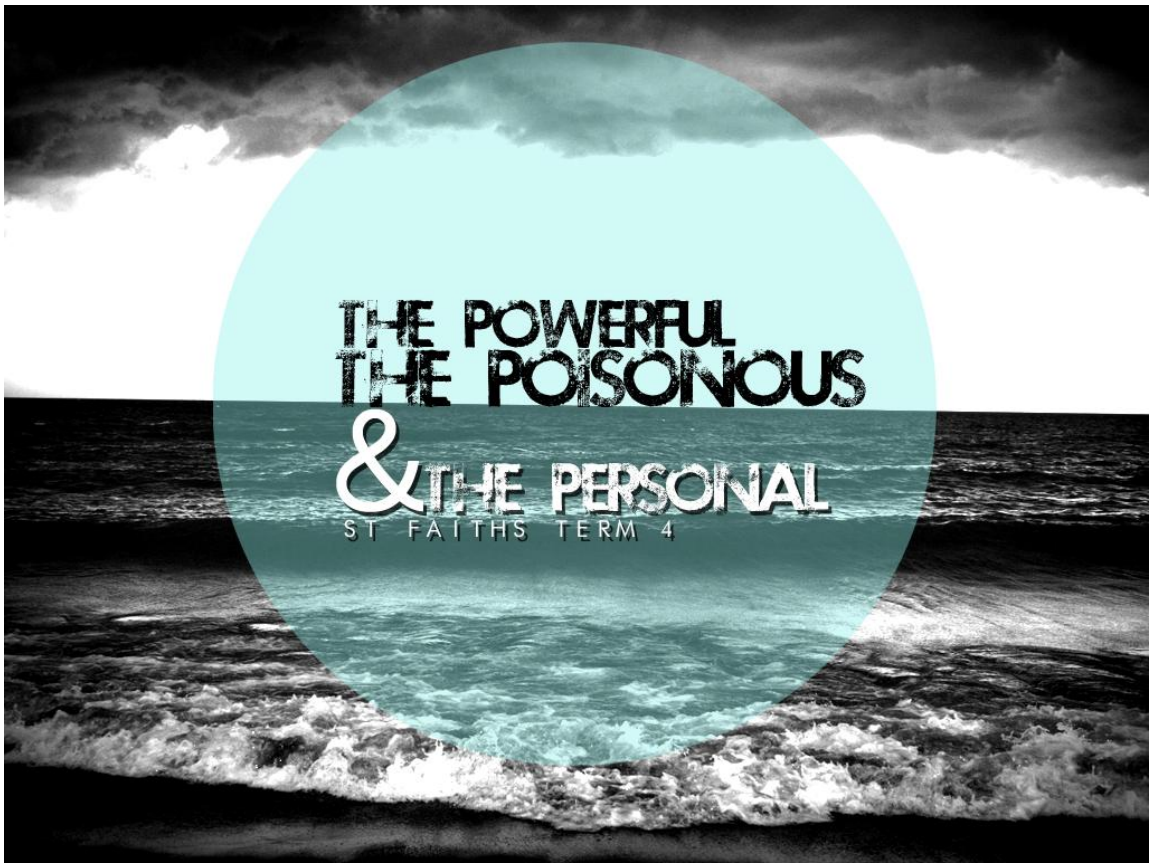
PDF Complete
Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features



Bible Studies for St Faith's Small Groups
Term 4, 2011

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

BLE OF CONTENTS

			Page
			4
Study	**Title**	**Sermon date**	
1	The Powerful Gospel	15/16 Oct	5
2	The Prosperity Gospel	22/23 Oct	9
3	How to be a Church Filled with the Holy Spirit	29/30 Oct	12
4	Baptism of the Holy Spirit	5/6 Nov	16
5	What is the 'Sacrament' of the Lord's Supper?	12/13 Nov	19
6	How to Pray to Satan	19/20 Nov	22
7	Is it 'Lack of Faith' When Christians are Sick?	26/27Nov	25
8	Dealing with Cults	3/4Dec	28

Appendixes

1	The Powerful Gospel	32
2	A Biblical Response to the Prosperity Gospel	34
3	Filled by the Spirit	41
4	Baptism in the Holy Spirit and "speaking in tongues"	45
5	The Lord's Supper and Sacraments	48
6	Teasing the toothless tiger	50
7	Is it God's will for you to be sick?	57

Note: the studies are intended if possible to be done privately and with your bible study group before you listen to the talk in church

Copyright © 2011 All Rights Reserved
St. Faith's Anglican Church, Clarke St. Narrabeen

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

the Poisonous and the Personal"

dies for St. Faith's Small Groups

Introduction

Last term we studied the book of 1Timothy. Paul writes to his deputy Timothy, telling him to sort out the problems in the church at Ephesus. Explaining the seriousness of the situation, Paul tells Timothy what is behind the false teaching that is going on in the church. In 1Timothy 4:1 he writes:

> "The spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons."

"In the later times" refers to the age in which we live, between the first and second comings of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this period, God's Holy Spirit is warning His people that teachers will emerge, claiming to speak on His behalf. But, in fact, they will be teaching things that they have learnt from demons. They are deceived and deceiving and, Timothy's job is to expose them for what they are. Why? Because of what they teach, and the example they give, they are a poison which will destroy God's people. A poison which will endanger the salvation of those who follow them.

Now, the difficulty for us is to know which teachings, around us today, are to be taken with such seriousness. Certainly, Paul points very briefly to one example in 1Timothy 4:3. But we live in a world with many Christian groups and denominations, and with a huge variety of differing emphases and teachings. How can we know which are poisonous, like the false teachings in Ephesus? Of course there are other teachings that are simply a matter of "personal preference". How a group chooses to conduct church affairs, etc, etc. They are neither right nor wrong so, should not be taught as "gospel matters", and made a focus of attention. Timothy is rather to focus on teaching, and modelling, what is powerful. The true message he holds is powerful, because if he teaches it, and lives it out, he will save both himself and his hearers (1Timothy4:16). Of course this message is the "mystery which leads to godliness", the message about Jesus, that Timothy has been taught.

Our task this term is to work out how to tell the difference between the poisonous, the personal and the powerful. We will look at some of the key teachings of Christian sects and groups today, and evaluate them using the principles God's Holy Spirit gives us in Scripture. As we do so, we will learn which errors to simply overlook, and which to treat as very dangerous.

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

which groups we should not to allow our children to ed to know which groups we can co-operate with in now how to deal with doctrines that others want to share on Beach Missions, in joint School Scripture (SRE) events etc. etc.

So, let's look carefully at these key teachings, and pray that God's Holy Spirit would show us His assessment of each.
Kerry Nagel
September 2011.

Use of these Studies

The following studies are suggested ways of discussing the particular 'Teaching' identified for each week. For most, an article has also been included in the Appendixes which seeks to assess the subject from a biblical perspective. Groups can choose to simply discuss the subject, based on the article, do the bible readings and studies, or simply research the subject themselves. Group leaders should give guidance on what is best for their group. As usual, prior reading and thinking will greatly improve the value of group discussions. Also, in this series, feel free to spend more weeks on one study, and omit another you feel is less important for you. Most studies stand alone, and do not require previous subjects to have been covered.

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

y 1 - The Powerful Gospel

d Appendix 1 on Page 32)

1. Getting started

a) List as many things as you can, that you see are "dividing" Christians today.

b) Discuss which things you think are good reasons to "make a stand", and which are not.

2. Paul takes a stand

a) Read Galatians 2:11-13. Paul reports a confrontation with Peter, in verse 11. Paul "takes a stand" on a vital issue. What is it about, in general terms?

b) From verse 12, what had Peter done, and why had he done it?

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

ul describe this behaviour?

d) Read v14-16. How do you think Peter would have felt about Paul's actions?

e) Why did Paul feel the need to make such a "public confrontation" with Peter? What was at stake? Discuss.

3. For the Present time

Peter had separated from other Christians over matters that really were not important for Christians at all. By doing so, Peter was making a statement about Christian living which was not of God. (In 1Timothy 4:1-4 Paul called it a doctrine of demons).

From your list in question 1, are there any matters which Christians say are "necessary for salvation" when they are "not necessary for salvation" according to the Bible.

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

From verse 21 what had Peter (unintentionally) "set aside" by acting as if the Old Testament food laws mattered?

How was this so? Discuss.

b) In verse 20-21, Paul describes his present life. What has changed him?

c) In what way is he different? Discuss.

d) From these verses, what are things that all Christians have in common?

5. Conclusion

How can we act toward other Christians, to show that we believe the gospel of Christ is important? Discuss.

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

	PRAYER POINTS

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

d Appendix 2 on Page 34)

1. Getting started

a) Would you say that you are prosperous? Why, or why not?

b) "To become prosperous, what a person has to do is behave, receive, and act upon God's promises". Discuss.

c) The Claim

Many religious leaders (claiming to be Christian) teach something like the following):

> *"We believe that God wants to heal and transform us so we can live healthy and prosperous lives in order to help others more effectively."*

We will look at the question of healing and health in a later study. Here, we want to consider the claim that it is God's will for Christians to be prosperous.

Look at the following passages, and discuss what they say in this regard:

i) Proverbs 13:21

ii) Deuteronomy 28:1-11

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

iv) John 12:20-26

v) 2 Corinthians 13:7-10

vi) Ephesians 5:3-7

3. Assessment

a) From the above passages, what dangers are there in encouraging people to think that God wants them to be wealthy? Discuss.

b) How should you speak to Christians who are not "prospering" at present? Discuss.

c) What warning is there for us, in this matter of "prosperity"?

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

	PRAYER POINTS

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

w to Be Filled with the Holy Spirit

d Appendix 3 on Page 41)

1. Getting started

a) What do you think Christians expect today, when they talk about being "filled with the Holy Spirit"?

b) What sort of actions or behaviour or atmosphere would people expect in a church meeting, where congregation members were "filled with the Holy Spirit"? Discuss

2. Turning to the Scriptures

There is one instruction in God's word that commands Christians to be filled with God's spirit. It is in Ephesians 5:18.

a) Read Ephesians 5:8-21. What two ways of living are compared in v8-16?

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

led by, the Holy Spirit, is the "opposite" of another ad verse 18. What does being "filled" with wine oes it affect someone's thinking and acting? What are some of the consequences of this?

c) Verses 19-21 are all one sentence in the original language of the New Testament, giving four characteristics of being filled with God's Holy Spirit. List four, and explain what each means:

(i) v19a

(ii) v19b

(iii) v20

(iv) v21

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

ned in the following verses. How would "being filled in a family, from verses 22 and 25 especially?

e) In summary, how does the Holy Spirit influence people, as compared to alcohol?

3. Drawing things together

a) Some say that at St Faith's we are a 'Father, Son and Holy Bible' church (ie. the Holy Spirit is replaced by the Bible) but, when they go to their church 'God is in the House – you can feel the Spirit in the excitement of the church meeting.'

Discuss this opinion, of the results of the Holy Spirit's presence, in a group of Christians.

b) What could you do, to allow God's Spirit to fill your life?

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

	PRAYER POINTS

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

d Appendix 4 on Page 45)

1. Getting Started

There are many Christians today who hold the views commonly called "Pentecostalism". Perhaps the key doctrine of this group is as follows:

> *"We believe in the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a gift available to believers subsequent to the new birth, with normal evidence of speaking in other tongues."*

In other words, they claim that there is a 'Baptism of the Holy Spirit' that should be experienced by Christians some time after they are converted. And with that Baptism, there is the usual sign of 'speaking in tongues'. Those who do not have this experience then are not really 'Spiritual Christians'.
Discuss what experience, if any, you have had with Christians who teach this way.

2. Turning to Scripture

The term "Baptism with the Holy Spirit".

This expression occurs seven times in the New Testament. Four of these are John the Baptist's prophesy of what the Lord Jesus will do. (eg. Matthew 3:11) Two refer to the initial experiences of the Apostles and Cornelius (Acts 1:5 and 11:16). The only other occurrence of the term is in 1 Corinthians 12:13.

a) Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-13. From verse 13, who has been "baptized" by (or in) the Holy Spirit?

b) In verse 13, the word "one" is repeated. How many times is it used? What do you think Paul is emphasizing, in verses 12 and 13 especially?

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

ristian experience did the believers receive the Holy
enable them to do?

(Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-3, 12-13).

d) From verses 4-11, what sorts of things do only <u>some</u> Christians do?

e) <u>Why</u> does the Spirit give these various "gifts"? (v 7)

f) What else do they (the gifts) have in common? (v 4-6)

3. Drawing Things Together

a) How can we respond lovingly and respectfully to those who suggest that we should "speak" in tongues? (See appendix 4 also, on this)

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

1 Corinthians 12, regarding christians being divided
w can we act to respond to this warning? Discuss.

PRAYER POINTS

GROUP MEMBER	PRAYER POINTS

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

the 'Sacrament' of The Lord's Supper?

d Appendix 5 on Page 48)

1. Getting Started

One of the activities that divides Christians is the celebration of the "Lord's Supper" as it is sometimes called. For Christians in the Salvation Army, they do not celebrate any 'sacraments'. For those in the Roman Catholic Tradition, the sacrament of the Mass has great significance. For Roman Catholics, the bread and wine are understood to be changed into the body and blood of Jesus during the service. And there are other understandings of the event.

a) What "traditions" have you experienced yourself in this regard?

b) what have you found helpful or unhelpful? Why? Discuss.

2. Turning to Scripture.

a) Read 1 Corinthians 11 v17-30. What do you think the Christians in this church actually did as part of their meeting, to celebrate "The Lord's Supper"?

b) What does the apostle Paul say they are getting wrong?

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

d) What are they to do, to get this ‘right’?

3. For us today

a) What principles should govern all our church meetings , given what God says through Paul in this passage?

b) Should we continue to celebrate the Lord’s Supper as we do at StFaiths?

c) If so, how could we improve the way we do this? Discuss.

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

	PRAYER POINTS

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

6 – How to Pray to Satan

d Appendix 6 on Page 50)

1. Getting Started

a) Spiritual warfare is a hot topic amongst many Christians today. In particular, opposing Satan's work is to the fore. Some are taught to oppose Satan in prayer e.g. To command Satan in 'prayer' to leave a community-for example, a school community; to declare Satan 'bound' in a particular situation. What experience of these sorts of things have you seen or heard yourself?

b) How did you feel at the time?

c) What questions were raised for you?

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

x 6 "Teasing the toothless tiger", and check the

3. Discuss the following-

a) What are the dangers of 'demonizing' emotions or sins such as guilt, depression, anger, lust, pride and so on?

b) How is the Devil defeated? What concrete effects does that have for your life?

c) What would it be helpful to say to a Christian friend who prays 'commanding Satan' to leave a place? Discuss.

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

	PRAYER POINTS

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

ck of Faith' when Christians are sick?

d Appendix 7 on Page 57)

1. **The Claim**

   Some Christians teach the following:

   "We believe that God wants to heal and transform us so that we can live healthy and prosperous lives in order to help others more effectively."

   Practically, this can lead to people thinking that if a Christian is sick, they should pray, and if they have enough faith, God will heal them.

   a) Share what experience you have had of this sort of teaching.

   b) How did you think you would feel, if you were told this when you are sick? Why?

.

2. **Turning to Scripture.**

   a) Read the Article in Appendix 7, and the bible passages noted there. What are the key conclusions that the author John Chapman draws in this regard?

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

conclusions? Why, or why not?

c) What other Bible passages or doctrines do you see as relevant in this matter? In what way do they help us understand God's will for us in this regard?

3 Practical steps.

a) How could you respond in a helpful way to someone who spoke to you along the lines mentioned in the introduction above ? Discuss.

b) What things could we do at StFaiths, to better respond to the teaching in Scripture on healing? Discuss.

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

	PRAYER POINTS

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

dy 8 – Dealing with Cults

1. Getting Started

a) We have all seen reports of cults that are destructive of people who get involved. Cults use 'mind control' or manipulative techniques to control members. Usually there is a dominant personality leading the cult. Members are exploited by the leadership. Some of us will know people who have been caught up in cults, or we may even have been involved ourselves. Discuss any experience of such things you have had, or have heard of. (for a current example, look on the internet for reports of the cult led by A. J. Miller in Queensland, who claims to be Jesus Christ.)

b) What do you think is the attraction of such groups, for those who join up?

c) What do you think is the danger the cults pose, if any?

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

assages, and discuss how they help us understand how cults arise and how they can deceive people:

i) Matthew 24v1-8

ii) 1 Timothy 4v1-4

d) From the following passages, what are some helpful principles for responding to people involved in a cult?

i) 2 Timothy 2v24-26

ii) 2 John 7-11

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

children, or others we have some responsibility for, so that they will not get caught up in destructive cults. Discuss.

b) Pray for any people you know who are in danger of this sort of deception, today.

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

	PRAYER POINTS

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

pel

Briefing , December 2001, with the title, "When to unite and when to divide" . It raises points which help us work out when to make a stand, to defend the gospel, and when this is not appropriate. You can access the article for free on the Matthias Media website.

The article is by John Woodhouse. It begins as follows-

" Have you noticed the way in which 'divisiveness' has become a completely negative word? If an idea, a statement, a strategy, a proposal is judged to be 'divisive' then it is unwelcome. For example in my part of the world, in the Anglican denomination, there is a proposal to authorise lay persons to administer the Lord's Supper in church, just as lay persons may be authorized to preach God's Word. This is opposed by some who have no fundamental objection to it, except that it would be 'divisive'. Therefore it ought not to be pursued.

I suspect that our confusion is exacerbated today because the culture in which we find ourselves has enthroned what it calls 'tolerance' as the highest virtue. There is a tendency to welcome whatever unites and reject whatever divides. Unity is good. Division is bad. Perhaps there is a tendency among some of us who are determined not to be shaped by the world around us to take the opposite position and think that division is good and unity is bad.

But a moment's reflection tells any Christian person that neither position, as I have crudely expressed them, can be right. And I do not think any Christian really operates consistently with either outlook.

The truths that I hope to explore here are as follows:

- *there is unity that is godly. Jesus prayed for it: "that they may be one as we are one" (John 17:11, 22).*
- *there is unity that is ungodly. The tower-builders of Genesis sought it: "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth" (Gen 11:4).*
- *there is division that is godly. The one who prayed, "that they may be one" also said, "Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division" (Luke 12:51).*
- *there is division that is ungodly. Paul warned us, "watch out for those who cause divisions" (Rom 16:17).*

There are policies, actions and words which cause division and in the process honour

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

and words which cause division and grieve the Holy cies, actions and words which promote and express there are policies, actions and words which advance a unity which God hates.

I do not believe that we evangelicals are very good at distinguishing these things. We confuse them. Before we look at some ways in which this quest for unity has occurred in evangelical churches, organizations and denominations, we will endeavour to sketch out a brief biblical theology of the concept of 'one'.

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

e to the Prosperity Gospel.

, Nov 2006 published by Matthias Media. Used with permission)

1. Editorial Note

Is it good to desire prosperity and wealth?

God certainly seemed to think so when he put the prospect of great material blessing before the Israelites. “If you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God”, Moses promised Israel, then “the Lord will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground” and in pretty much every other area of fruit you can think of (see Deut 28:1-11). The prospect of this blessing would only have made any sense at all if it was perfectly right for the Israelites to want it.

But then we turn forward to the words of God through Paul, and discover that wanting to be wealthy is not a good thing at all: “If we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction” (1 Tim 6:8-9).

So should Christians seek wealth and prosperity or not? An increasingly vocal strand of Christendom is taking the Deuteronomy approach and saying, “Yes”.

What are we to think? What is God’s will for us?

2. Article- “A different Jesus”

(AUTHOR | ANDREW HEARD)

(The prosperity gospel promises health, wealth and success this side of heaven. Its message is dangerous, but not just because it raises unrealistic expectations. Andrew Heard argues that the real problem lies in its representation of Christ.)

In some Christian circles at the moment, another gospel is making itself known. It looks a lot like the gospel that we received the gospel of Jesus Christ who died and rose again to bring us reconciliation with God but it has an emphasis upon physical healing, material blessing and success that is very different from traditional evangelicalism. The difference doesn’t lie in the conviction that God can and does bless his people with physical healing or material prosperity, as this has always been accepted as biblical; the difference lies in the conviction that Christians ought to expect God to bless them physically and materially here and now.

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

prosperity gospel. It teaches that Christ's death has laid upon us at the Fall (Gal 3:10-13), it has also curse for example, sickness and poverty (cf. Deut 28:15-68) in this age. So Christians ought to expect, in this age, not only forgiveness of their sins but also in equal measure and with the same certainty health and wealth. If they live in sickness and poverty, they have failed to exercise true faith in God. For proponents of the prosperity gospel, this would be as offensive as a Christian continuing to live in sin: it dishonours the Christ who died that we might be healthy and rich.

It is not difficult to find these convictions expressed by prominent teachers today. Passages such as Joshua 1:8, Psalms 34:10, 35:27 and 37:25, Job 36:11, Mark 10:29-30, 2 Corinthians 8:9 and 3 John 2 are regularly used to support these views usually without much regard for context. An older example is seen in the writings of Kenneth Copeland: "You are an heir to the blessing which God gave to Abraham. This blessing, found in the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy, covers every area of your existence: spirit, soul, body, financially, and socially."[1] Elsewhere he says, "Healing is just as much a part of the plan of redemption as salvation, the Holy Spirit and heaven as your eternal home".[2] Jerry Savelle, an American televangelist once associated with Copeland, agrees: "Not only is it God's will to heal, it is God's will to heal all! Satan is the author of sickness and disease. By the authority of His Word, God has made provision for our healing. It is not the will of God that anyone be sick with any sickness or disease or pain whatsoever from hangnails to tuberculosis!"[3]

The prosperity gospel has also been taught in Australia. Brian Houston, senior pastor of Hillsong Church in Sydney, has written, "the Scriptures ... [are] full of promises of prosperity ... Is it God's will for you to prosper? ... the answer is undoubtedly YES".[4] There is no doubt he meant material prosperity, given the book's premise:

"If you and I can change our thinking and develop a healthy attitude toward money, I believe we can all walk in the blessing and prosperity that God intends for us. We will never have a problem with money again."[5]

Houston's words highlight another aspect of the thinking that drives the prosperity gospel. Many of its teachers believe that Christians don't walk in the prosperity that has been promised because they fail to step out in faith, and name and claim what is theirs by right, or they fail to live according to the 'rules' of prosperity found in Scripture. When Christians pray, they must pray believing that what they are asking for is theirs. Prayers that include the words "If it is your will" are faithless prayers and can't expect blessing. After praying for blessing, Christians must then follow this up with 'positive confession', thanking God for all that he has given them. Even if sickness or financial stress remain, the believer must transcend these things and

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

God and his word. Giving is also essential: on the .0, Kenneth Copeland preaches, "Do you want a ney? Give and let God multiply it back to you."[6]

This is not to say that preachers of the prosperity gospel are seeking to promote crass selfishness (although some of them do). Houston and others rightly emphasize the need to be generous with our prosperity. They insist that God prospers us so that we might be generous. Gloria Copeland, for example, writes, "Don't just believe God to meet your needs. Believe Him for a surplus of prosperity so that you can help others",[7] and Houston has said, "When a person understands that the resource that's in our lives is about the purpose of God, it releases you to believe God to resource your life".[8]

As commendable as this is (and in its best expressions it is very commendable), the foundation it is built on false expectations of God's promises for prosperity make the entire package wrong. The prosperity gospel not only misuses the Bible, it seriously misrepresents Christ. This is why a number of leading Bible scholars and pastors, including John Stott, have declared it to be a 'different gospel' not because it denies fundamental biblical teachings but because it adds false and misleading doctrines to them.[9]

There are a number of approaches I could take to demonstrate this point. One way would be to examine each of the proof texts to determine whether they have been exegeted correctly.[10] Another approach would be to consider the pastoral impact of this theology and the damage it does. But none of these take us to the core problem the problem that makes the error so serious. We need to consider this gospel in light of the cross, and one good place to do this is Paul's correspondence with the Corinthians.[11] The Corinthian church was full of problems not the least of which was an immaturity which led them to cling to worldly ways and ideals, despite the blessings they had received in Christ (1 Cor 3:1). Paul's deep concern for this church led him to write at least four letters, the second and fourth of which are our 1 and 2 Corinthians (as far as we can tell). In these letters, it is possible to discern a progression: in his first letter, he writes with great warmth and tenderness, naming them as "saints" of the "church of God" (1 Cor 1:2). But by his fourth letter (2 Corinthians), the problems have grown so serious, he finishes his letter by urging them to "examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith" (2 Cor 13:5). What has given rise to this concern? They appear to be on the path of accepting "another Jesus than the one Paul proclaimed" and therefore "a different gospel" to the one they had originally accepted (2 Cor 11:4).

In context, it seems that new teachers or "super-apostles" (2 Cor 11:5,12:11) were now ministering in the church, and their style was very different from Paul's. He describes them as "false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

3) because they brought a different gospel and a

How was their gospel different? Some have suggested it was a heresy similar to that of the Galatians. However, evidence for a "works theology" is slight and subtle. The visible and dominant issue is what has been called 'triumphalism': these new teachers brought a 'gospel' and a 'Jesus' of power and glory (triumph) without weakness and shame, and they had brought these things to a congregation already enamoured of such things (cf. 1 Cor 4:8-10).

It wasn't long before the Corinthians were led to believe that being in touch with Jesus would lead to victory, power and success (all defined in worldly terms). The new teachers showed evidence of this themselves: they came with letters of recommendation (2 Cor 3:1), they had the right background, they were impressive speakers, and they performed signs and wonders to support their teachings (cf. Paul's critique in 2 Cor 12:11-13).

By comparison, Paul was regarded as second-rate. He didn't march into town and start mega churches; on the contrary, he was run out of most of them. He wrote decent letters, but he wasn't a trained speaker and he wasn't very impressive in person (2 Cor 10:10). He got sick and he suffered (2 Cor 11:24-12:10). The Corinthian attitude towards Paul began to cool, and the church became in danger of not only leaving Paul behind but also leaving the One he pointed to behind.

How did Paul combat this problem? He taught the Corinthians about the true Jesus, the ministry of the cross and his own ministry. Jesus didn't walk in triumph according to the standards of the world. He suffered and was crucified. Therefore a true apostle doesn't live triumphantly (according to worldly standards). Instead, true power and true wisdom are found in weakness. This is why Paul reminds them of the very beginning of his ministry among them when he focused on the cross (1 Cor 2:2). He wanted the Corinthians to know that God's ways are not man's ways and that God's power is seen in weakness particularly in the humiliation of the cross (1 Cor 1:18). Jews thought that miraculous signs were evidence that a person was in touch with the powerful God, and Greeks thought sophisticated rhetoric was proof of the divine, but Paul preached Christ crucified, "a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:22-24). But for those who have the Spirit, it becomes miraculously clear that this is where true power and true wisdom are found (1 Cor 1:24; cf. 2:9-13).

Paul was once no different from the Corinthians. Before his conversion, he judged Christ by worldly standards "according to the flesh" (2 Cor 5:16). Like other first-century Jews, Paul thought that Jesus was an imposter because he didn't come at the head of a great army the triumphant Messiah (cf. Ps 2). But when Paul's eyes

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

e saw Jesus in all his glory. He saw that Christ's ength and wisdom (1 Cor 1:25). He saw too that n suffering (Acts 9:16). For Paul, true spiritual power is found in what the world regards as weakness. So he says,

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor 12:9-10)

This was a great rebuke to the Corinthians and the false apostles. Paul was saying that in the ministry of the weak, God shows his true power. Conversion, maturity and church growth all demonstrate the true power of God, because nothing in the clay vessels God uses can explain the outcomes (2 Cor 4:7ff). The growth of the Corinthian church, for example, was clear testimony to the power of God because it began from news about a crucified Messiah, declared through a minister as weak and nervous as Paul (1 Cor 2:3-5). Paul was so confident that God would bless his 'weak' words, he was never tempted to spice them up or play games; he proclaimed them without adornment (2 Cor 4:2). At this point, the seriousness of the error Paul was combating needs to be highlighted. The Corinthians were in danger of making exactly the same mistake Paul and his Jewish contemporaries made about Jesus. By focusing on the triumphalist Messiah, the Jews were completely uninterested in the true Messiah when he came the suffering one. The Corinthians, in embracing a triumphalist Christian life, were in danger of recasting Jesus as a triumphalist Messiah, and so effectively following a new Jesus (2 Cor 11:3-4). The evidence was that they were growing cold towards the true Messiah's apostle (2 Cor 1:1).12 This highlights a very important principle: we are what we follow. The life of Christ and the shape of Christian ministry are intimately tied together. This is just what Jesus taught in Mark 8:34: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny him- self and take up his cross and follow me". If you follow the crucified Messiah, you must be prepared to go the way the Messiah went along the road of rejection, suffering and death. In fact, we are only "fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him" (Roman 8:17).

As noted at the outset, the problems at Corinth weren't identical to the modern prosperity gospel. But in many modern manifestations of it, it's clear this gospel has sprung from the same root. It isn't just that future blessing has been mistakenly assumed to be ours now; it's that the nature of the Christian life and the nature of Christ himself have been profoundly skewed. For prosperity gospel teachers, Christian suffering is out; triumph and worldly success are in. We ought to expect victory in our finances, victory over sickness, and power to march through life successfully. We are encouraged not to pray like older faithless Christians, but

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

nd claim our requests now. Triumph, success and that we are in touch with the 'powerful' Jesus. Our e this same power: if we build 'successful' churches (large and prosperous ones), the world will be won over by how impressive they (and therefore we) are. Our ministers should be powerful and influential. If we dress like we are a success, success will follow. None of this is very different from the 'theology of glory' Luther railed against in the medieval church; it has just reasserted itself in a modern guise.

Some of the leaders who teach the prosperity gospel have actually explicitly reshaped Jesus. We are now told that he was, in fact, wealthy (we are told the evidence for this lies in the fact that his robe was seamless). We are therefore to live like he lived in wealth. But other teachers aren't so obvious in their reshaping of Jesus. They make little mention of him. Even so, the life and ministry they promise Jesus' followers is so at odds with the life and ministry of the true Jesus, it will inevitably cause many to imagine a different Jesus to the Jesus revealed to us in the Bible.

Certainly the prosperity gospel is teaching a whole generation of young Christians to measure their leaders by the same standards the super-apostles measured Paul. As a result, like the Corinthians, many modern church-goers are rejecting humble, faithful, godly servants of Christ for the super version of the gospel which is really no gospel at all.

But the key to spiritual success will not be found in following a different Jesus. The key to spiritual success is utter dependence on the God the Apostle Paul followed. We don't need more positivism. More and more the church is depending on lighting, amplification, looks, emotionalism, reward, hype and appeals to selfishness to increase in number and influence. But we must not be blinded by such worldly ways of thinking. These churches may look like they are in touch with the power of God, but their unreadiness to proclaim the offensive message of the cross, to condemn materialism and greed, and to call people to stand with the crucified one (even if it won't bring any earthly rewards) is really spiritual faithlessness to the true gospel.

Our lives and ministries should be shaped by the saviour we follow: we are to walk the way he walked. This doesn't mean delighting in poor lighting, bad music, boring preaching and lack of emotion; rather we should place our confidence where it ought to be in the power of the cross and the glory of the crucified one. If we get the Christian life wrong, it's because we have a wrong understanding of the true gospel of the true Jesus. We need more leaders who truly believe that God is powerful to save through the foolishness of the cross leaders who won't be shaped by modern skepticism and led to despair leaders who will faithfully, urgently,

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

preach his powerful gospel. The irony here is that nfident, courageous and spiritually powerful, even way in the eyes of the world.

Endnotes

1. Kenneth Copeland, Welcome to the Family, KCP Publications, Fort Worth, 1979, p. 22.

2. Kenneth Copeland, You Are Healed, KCP Publications, Fort Worth, 1979, p. 7.

3. Jerry Savelle, God's Provision for Healing, Harrison House, Tulsa, 1981, p. 8.

4. Brian Houston, You Need More Money: Discovering God's Amazing Financial Plan for Your Life, Maximised Leadership, Castle Hill, 1999, pp. 10, 55.

5. ibid., p. 3. Although this book has been removed from publication, in a series of talks published in 2004 called Prosperity with Purpose, Houston states, "If I had my life over, one thing I would do is write a similar book but I'd definitely change the title". Although the talks are very strongly against selfishness in prosperity (and very helpfully stated), the claim that we are to 'believe for prosperity' still grounds the thinking.

6. Kenneth Copeland, The Laws of Prosperity, Kenneth Copeland Publications, Fort Worth, 1974, p. 67.

7. QuotedbyDennisHollingerin'Enjoying God Forever: A Historical/Sociological Profile of the Health and Wealth Gospel', in The Gospel and Contemporary Perspectives: Viewpoints from the Trinity Journal, ed. Douglas Moo, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, 1997, p. 16.

8. Brian Houston, Prosperity with Purpose, Maximised Leadership, 2004 (audio CD).

9. Some helpful comments by John Stottcanbe found in Issues facing Christians Today, Marshall Pickering, London, 1990, p. 244.

10. Books like Brian Rosner's Beyond Greed do this well (Matthias Media, Sydney, 2004).

11. It needs to be noted upfront that the problem at Corinth isn't what we call the prosperity gospel. Rather, many of the manifestations of the prosperity gospel are expressions of the same error.

12. If it is the case that the dominant error was triumphalism, then Paul's point is that although you can have orthodox theology at every point (grace alone, faith alone, etc.), if you add triumphalism to this, you have adopted a new Jesus and a different gospel. See The Cross and Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons from 1 Corinthians by DA Carson (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 2004).

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

Introduction

‘Be filled *with* the Spirit’ is the catch- cry of many contemporary Christians. For some it is their divinely inspired charter of Christian liberty, of personal fulfilment and freedom. For starters, being filled with the Spirit is in line with God’s will, because there is a clear exhortation in Scripture itself (in these verses). What is more, this kind of fulness stands over against another sort, a classic mark of our society today, ‘being full of booze, or drunk with wine’ (Eph 5:18). According to some contemporary Christians, God says to his children, “Get your highs on the Spirit not on intoxicating drink!”.

This liberty is worked out in a variety of ways. Sometimes warrant is drawn from the Book of Acts for contemporary believers to be engaged regularly in a whole range of supernatural activities, performing miraculous deeds, receiving words of knowledge and the like in fact, all the things the apostles did because they were filled with the Spirit. There are other practices too that some contemporary Christians believe arise out of this text: all kinds of ways for obtaining Christian guidance, as well as unusual behaviour like laughing or barking.

I want to suggest, however, that the current view has hijacked a precious text of God’s word in the interests of a Christian variation of ‘doing one’s own thing’. In the process it has failed to come to grips with the true meaning of this exhortation, and denied us the encouragement and assurance which the passage provides.

Let us try and understand what this exhortation means within the context of Ephesians, and then draw out the appropriate theological and pastoral implications for us.

God’s gracious purposes

The popular view isolates the exhortation, ‘Be filled with the Spirit’, from its context and makes it a peg on which to hang a whole bag of ideas bought in the supermarkets of post- modernism. Because the current view unhinges our text from the Scriptures, it doesn’t help us understand the relationship between being filled by the Spirit and God’s purposes for his people.

This exhortation of Ephesians 5:18 needs to be understood in the light of God’s overall purposes the big picture of his gracious eternal plan, as outlined in chapters

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

ing reconciled to God in Christ and, among other d's new humanity. The implications are enormous. es his readers to live a life worthy of the calling they have received. This exhortation is the heading that sets the direction for the remainder of the letter (chaps. 4-6). We are to "walk" in holiness, that is, in a way that pleases God and is diametrically opposed to the non-Christian lifestyle around us (4:17). At 5:2 we are to "walk" in love, in other words, as imitators of God and following Christ's example; and we are to "walk" as children of light (5:8). Now, in our passage (5:15-21), Paul tells us to be very careful how we live (the same Greek word for 'walk') meaning that we are to act wisely, to understand what things please the Lord Jesus Christ, and to be filled by God's Spirit.

Although there are several links in the chain, briefly we are to obey the exhortation, 'Be filled by the Spirit', because this is part of walking worthily of our calling. And this has to do with our being in Christ and thus a part of God's marvellous purposes of summing up everything in the universe in his Son (1:9, 10).

Our response to this exhortation should be personal and whole-hearted, not simply for reasons of personal fulfilment, as the current view would have us believe.

Being filled by the Spirit is the opposite to a non-Christian lifestyle

Why the contrast in v. 18, "Do not get drunk on wine"? There is no evidence that drunkenness was rife in the churches to which the letter to the Ephesians was sent. Nor does Paul imply that they were already getting drunk. Paul contrasts being filled by the Spirit with drunkenness because it characterized the old non-Christian way of life. Drunkenness epitomized the ways of darkness. It lay at the centre of the destructive and unacceptable lifestyle that belonged to these Christians' past, and was no longer consistent with membership of the new people of God.

From Ephesians 4:17 on, Paul has been drawing a sharp contrast between behaviour which characterizes the unbelieving world and that of God's people. The pagan life-style has been painted in dark colours (4:17-24) and these Christians have been urged not to go back to the old ways. Instead, they "learned Christ" (4:20) when they were converted, and now they are to live according to his character, what Paul calls the "new man". Drunkenness leads to sexual excess and debauchery, for those who are drunk give way to dissolute and reckless deeds. The apostle's prohibition, then, is part of his rejection of that former way of life.

However, the apostle's focus is positive, not negative: his emphasis is on the Spirit's in-filling, and the results of this are explained in the verses which follow (vv. 19-21). Those who have been "sealed" by the Holy Spirit, and told that they must not "grieve" him (1:13; 4:30), are now urged to be filled *by* the Spirit.

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

s on Christ

on is unusual: there is no parallel to it anywhere else in the whole Bible. The Greek expression simply means "Be filled by the Spirit". It does not mean "Be filled with the Spirit", as though the Spirit is the fluid that fills the bottle. No, the Holy Spirit is the *agent*, the one by whom believers are filled. That is, the Spirit does the pouring. So what is the content, then? What does the Spirit pour? The answer is given in earlier references in Ephesians to 'fulness'. According to chapter 1:23 the church as Christ's body already shares his fulness. Colossians 1:19 and 2:9 tell us that the divine fulness is perfectly found in Christ. In his prayer of Ephesians 3:19, which introduces the latter half of Ephesians, Paul prays that his Christian readers will "be filled to all the fulness of God", a reference not simply to the Father but to the triune God. Further, the ascended Christ is the agent who fills all things, and this he does by giving spiritual gifts (i.e. gifted ministers) to his people (4:11). The final goal to which the body of Christ is moving is mature manhood, and this is defined in terms of the fulness of Christ (4:13).

In our passage (5:18), the Spirit is to fill us with the fulness of God and Christ. And what does this mean? The Spirit of God is hard at work transforming us into the likeness of God and Christ. To be filled by the Spirit means to be subject to the Spirit's control, which is another way of saying we are to let Christ's word rule in our lives (see the parallel passage in Col. 3:16, 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom by means of Spirit-inspired psalms, hymns and songs, singing thankfully to God with your whole being'). It simply means to come under the lordship of Christ, as the Spirit makes us more and more like Christ.

The current emphasis in some quarters on the Spirit as the content of this fulness separates the Spirit's work from Christ and is therefore to our Lord's detriment.

The now and the not yet

The exhortation to be filled by the Spirit is part of the tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet'. From one perspective the church as

Christ's body *already* shares his fulness (1:23). From another angle, Paul's prayer that we might be filled to all the fulness of God shows that we have not yet arrived. It assumes that Christians have *not yet* been filled: God begins to answer this petition in the here and now, and he will finish his work on the final day when we have been filled with *all* his fulness. Similarly, the body of Christ has *not yet* reached maturity; it is moving towards the fulness of Christ (4:13). And in the process the Holy Spirit is powerfully at work in us both individually and corporately.

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

ong emphasis on God's activity in bringing his people to fulness, this transforming work is not done apart from our personal involvement. As elsewhere in the Bible there is an *inter-play between the divine and the human*. God does the filling. Paul asks the Father to fill us in 3:19; in 4:10 it is Christ; and in 5:18 it is 'by the Spirit' that God's people are filled.

At the same time believers, both individually and corporately, are to be fully involved in this process of infilling. All are actively engaged in building Christ's body so that it reaches maturity, that is, his fulness (4:12-13). We are all urged to be imitators of God, and this involves walking in love after the pattern of Christ's love (5:1, 2). Although we do not fill ourselves, we are to be receptive to the Spirit's transforming work, making us into the likeness (i.e. fulness) of God and Christ. The goal is to attain to what in principle we already have in Christ fulness and spiritual maturity.

If drunkenness leads to dissolute behaviour, then 'filled' Christians whose lives are characterized by singing, thanksgiving and mutual submission present a very different picture indeed (vv. 19-21). If Paul's exhortation is understood correctly, then what will follow in terms of appropriate attitudes and behaviour within a range of relationships is nothing short of revolutionary. But that is a long way from the contemporary agenda.

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

1. The Claim

One of the larger groups within the world-wide Christian church is the Pentecostal group. There are many divisions within this wider movement, each with its own distinctive set of beliefs. But the key conviction that they share is the following:

> *"Belief in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit for all believers, with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues".*

The claim is that Christians who do not have this experience do not know the full presence of the Holy Spirit. Such people are missing out on the key blessing that God wants to give them. They lack his enabling power, by His spirit, to lead them into a full experience of God.

In this study we examine the experience typically identified today as "speaking in tongues". And we assess whether the teaching associated with it is powerful (as claimed) pointless or poisonous.

2. Speaking in Tongues

(a) The Experience of Some of the Early Christians

There is no doubt that the gift of the Holy Spirit included a profound experience for the apostles. On the day of Pentecost, we are told:

> "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues, as the spirit enabled them", (Acts2:4)

As we read on we discover that these "tongues" were the native languages of the members of the crowd. A crowd the people drawn from all around the Mediterranean. They are astonished because they realize that these twelve Galileans have not been trained to speak their tongue.

This gives Peter the chance to explain that God's Spirit has done this, and that he announcement that they have heard in their own language, about Jesus' death and resurrection, is indeed from God.

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

see is that the "speaking in tongues" reported here
age (the word tongue simply means "language").

Now, the first Christians were all Jewish, but God soon sends Peter to witness to a god fearing gentile named Cornelius. Peter, and the other Jewish Christians, find it hard to believe that God could accept "unclean" Gentiles as His people. But, when Peter announces the message about Jesus to Cornelius and his family and friends, something astonishing happens. All who heard the message received the Holy Spirit. How did Peter know? Because they had the same experience as the Apostles at Pentecost. (Acts 10:44-47) It is important to see that these Gentiles began speaking of God's great deeds in other known languages.(not unknown babble) It is the very fact that it was the SAME experience that Peter and the Apostles had, that convinced Peter that God had welcomed even Gentiles into his family.

Now, the experience of speaking in other "tongues" or languages is also reported in one of the early churches, in Corinth. Briefly, it is an ability God's Holy Spirit had given to some Christians there. It is important to see that only some Christians were given this gift by God's Holy Spirit. (1Cor 12:10).Paul explains that God has given him this gift, and he commends it to others. (1Corinthians 14:5) Yet Paul gives it a lower priority than speaking in words all can understand (1 Cor. 14:19), and insists it only be used in public when someone can interpret. (1Cor 14:28).It is important to see this in perspective. Paul does not even mention this gift in any of his other letters. It was not any part of the experience the Christians in any other place, as far as we know. And Paul did not see the need to instruct Christians in any of these other churches to seek this gift.

So, we can safely say that the experience of speaking in tongues was NOT the sign of baptism in the Holy Spirit, in the early church. Rather, as Paul makes clear in

1 Corinthians 2:1-3, the sign of the Spirit's presence was faith in Jesus, as Lord. (More on this in next study)

(b) The experience of "ecstatic utterances"

Even if god did not give this gift of speaking in other languages to all Christians in the first century, it is still of course possible that he is doing so today. We

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

e "phenomenon" that we see around us is the same
s and 1Corinthians. Pentecostals call what they do
this is a clever way of assuming that it is the same gift of God that the apostles experienced. But, there are good reasons to think that this is not so:

(i) The apostles and others who had the gift spoke in "known" languages, while Christians today utter sounds that have no inherent meaning (babble).

(ii) The early Christians who spoke this way received the gift at their conversion not later. Today, people are often taught to "experience the gift", being told to start babbling and then let God take over. This happens at some time after their conversion.

(iii) What we could call "ecstatic utterances" are well known in other religions, and so of themselves such babble cannot be evidence of Baptism in the Holy Spirit.

3. Responding to Pentecostalism

First, we need to be careful not to judge another person's service of the Lord Jesus. Their service of the Lord Jesus is a matter between the person and their master. it is not for us to condemn it, or to try to take the role of correcting them, uninvited. (If someone feels it is helpful for them, why should they not do it?)

Second, as far as I can see, of itself the behavior of "ecstatic speech" is not ungodly, or promoting ungodliness. What we might need to be aware of is what is "attached" to it. (See following studies)

Third, we need to politely disagree with Pentecostals who suggest that our Christian experience is somehow lacking, because we do not behave as they do. And we would be wise to urge our children, and others whom God might call us to assist, to avoid this error. It is at best a distraction.

For this reason also we cannot share in ministry with Pentecostals who insist on this so called "gift" as part of their evangelism. This will effect our ability to serve together on Beach Missions, etc. etc.

Fourth, we need to emphasise the genuine evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. To this we turn in our next study.

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

his question from a Biblical perspective are –

1. First article is "What's in this meal?" By John Woodhouse - from the Briefing October 1993. (Again, articles freely available on the Matthias Media web-site)

John Concludes- *"that if you built your understanding of Christianity by studying the whole New Testament (except 1 Corinthians 10-11), you would not have any reason to think that Christianity involves a sacramental meal instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper, in which the bread and the cup are given symbolic significance. In this article, I want to ask whether the relevant texts in 1 Corinthians really change that understanding."*

2. Second article is "The Body of the Lord"- The Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians- John Woodhouse, in the following edition of the Briefing.

Here, his conclusion is –

The pressing question for today's Christians is, if it is not certain that Jesus instituted a sacramental meal, what attitude should modern Christians adopt to the well established church practice? On this I will make the following comments.

1. It would be wrong to make the sacrament the centre of church life, or to elevate it above other gatherings of God's household. Whenever we meet to- gether, we do so on the basis of Christ's death for us, and our conduct must be shaped by Christ's self-sacrifice. Our gathering must "proclaim the Lord's death". The principles and warnings of 1 Corinthians 11 should be applied to every Christian gathering. The Lord's Supper must not be put in a class by itself.

2. However, an over-reaction would also be wrong. Consider the analogy of the Lord's Prayer. It is likely that Jesus did not intend the Lord's Prayer to be recited word-for-word by Christians. It was a model for all prayer: "This, then, is how you should pray". That does not mean that it is wrong for Christians to have remembered the words of the Lord's Prayer, and use them, and treasure them. It cannot be wrong to pray that prayer, even if Jesus' intention was not quite that!

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

conducted in evangelical churches, can be a great rink together in such a way that we remember the do! To do this by remembering the Last Supper, and even modelling our meal to some extent on that occasion, can be very helpful indeed. Furthermore, the rich gospel content of the Lord's Supper liturgies, such as the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, is a wonderful heritage. We ought to value every means by which we can bring the death of Christ to the centre of our thinking, and make his sacrifice the basis of our fellowship.

3. We must beware of ritualism. An activity becomes a ritual when it is valued chiefly because of its familiar repeated form. The idea that the Lord's Supper is based on Jesus' command "Do this in remembrance of me", sometimes is distorted into ritualism. "Do this" is understood as a command to repeat a formal action, and we can be satisfied that we have "done it". However we will not be much better than the Corinthians if we regularly "attend" the Lord's Supper, but disregard the people there (remember 1 Co 11:29!).

4. It would be an imbalance to devote ourselves to the sacramental meal but neglect real meals together. Christians should share meals together, and they should be gospel-demonstrating occasions. Our behaviour towards one another, modelled on the Lord's self- sacrifice, should proclaim his death.■

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

The New Testament is clear about Satan. He is thoroughly defeated by the Lord Jesus. That is certain. But Jesus' people still need to be wary of him. Never centre stage but in our peripheral vision, this toothless tiger needs to be noted but teased by our relative indifference to him. Snigger, but nevertheless resist.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil… (Jas 4:7)

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith. (1 Pet 5:8-9)

But how should this resistance take place? What do we need to know about Satan in order to resist him most effectively?

On two occasions, Paul's language suggests that the adversary has strategies at work. When instructing the Ephesians to "put on the whole armour of God", it is with the intention that "you may be able to stand against the schemes [*methodeia*] of the devil" (Eph 6:11). When writing to the Corinthians, the apostle explains his readiness to forgive others, "so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs [noemata]" (2 Cor 2:11). The first word indicates 'methods' and 'stratagems', whereas the second word speaks of 'thoughts' or 'designs'.

The human wisdom that says 'know thy enemy' would suggest that we should therefore inquire into Satan's methods and designs. Surely it is important to know how he works, lest we succumb to his stratagems? Surely if we know his *modus operandi* our resistance will become much simpler?

If this logic is followed, then the next question arises naturally: how do we find out about how Satan works? Is there a way of becoming familiar with the tactics of the devil?

At that point we run into a minor hitch and a major distraction. The minor hitch is that the Bible is not really interested in providing us with detailed information about the devil. Its main game is to tell the good news of Jesus Christ: that the Son of God has come into our world, died, risen from the dead and all this 'for us', to bring us to God and give us an eternally secure home. In order to teach us this good news, the Bible touches upon all kinds of other things, but, because they are only peripheral to its message, many of these other things never come clearly into focus. Something is said, but often not enough to get a distinct picture. Given how he fascinates us in our fantasy novels and films, it may surprise many to learn that the

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

category.

in his first letter John tells us "the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). This is *primarily* a statement about the Son of God, and only *secondarily* about the devil. This, in a sense, summarizes the approach to the devil found in the whole of the Scriptures: we only learn about him so we can hear of his defeat. We only 'see' him and his darkness in the light of Christ's victory over him. This doesn't require a full understanding or description of him at all, so we aren't given one. The silences of Scripture must be recognized. If we aren't told much, then we don't need to know much. If there is a relative silence about the devil, then we should maintain that relative silence.

At this point, the minor hitch becomes a major distraction. The relative silence of the Scriptures about the devil does not sit easily with many people. Satan is a fascinating topic and it is easy to be drawn into his fascination, in an attempt to fill in the 'gap' in the biblical presentation. In recent decades, an increasing number of those of more charismatic persuasion have argued that not only is it *essential* to know the schemes of the devil in order to resist him, but that this required knowledge can be gained by what they call 'ministry experience'.

This refers to the experience gained from direct dealings with demons. In 'prayer counselling' sessions with people purportedly troubled by evil spirits, information is gained by addressing the demons and forcing them to answer the counsellor's questions. Thus a bank of information about 'the devil and his schemes' can be gradually built up. Those who have this 'ministry experience' gain guru-like status as those who *really know* about the devil. And as the charismatics are themselves recognizing more and more they also have a tendency to become unhealthily obsessed with him.

However, this must be one of the most misguided practices to have ever arisen under the name of 'Christianity'. One of the things that Jesus clearly said about the devil was that:

[He] has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44)

How can we possibly hope to get true information about anything, let alone about himself out of this arch-liar? And besides, why would we want to? A long strand of Old Testament teaching forbids divination and the consultation of spirits (Deut 18:10; 1 Sam 15:23; 2 Kings 17:17; Mic 3:11; Ezek 13:23, 21:21, etc.), for "should not a people inquire of their God?" (Isa 8:19). Jesus himself refused to allow the demons to speak even when they said true things about him (e.g. Mark 1:25, 34;

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

ries are urging direct engagement in order to milk on about the devil's schemes. Perhaps an exorcistic is point: be gone with such unbiblical and misguided practices!

The Bible on Satan

If we are supposed to learn about the devil's schemes, there is only one place from which we should learn them. As Isaiah put it:

To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. (Isa 8:20)

Even though the information about Satan is secondary to the grand central message about Jesus, quite a picture of him can be built up in our peripheral vision and it is not a pretty picture. What follows is a representative sample.

Perhaps we should begin this 'anatomy of the devil's schemes' with his various names. They all say something about his ways; he is the Satan (the accuser), the devil (slanderer), the adversary, the evil one, the enemy, the tempter.

Jesus said he was "a murderer from the beginning" and "the father of lies" (John 8:44), referring back to the narrative of the fall (Gen 3:1-6). Here we see him in the form of the serpent, questioning God's word, doubting God's goodness, and denying that reality is the way God says it is. Here are his lies. And his lies have a specific purpose: to kill. For when Adam and Eve gave into his tempting and ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, this spelled their doom (Gen 2:17), and with their sin death entered into the world (Rom 5:12).

This original story shows that Satan wields the power of death (Heb 2:14-15), not because he administers it himself but because of his role as tempter. He lured our first parents away from trusting God's good word, and this led to their downfall. Later, he also wields the power of death because he is the accuser (Zech 3:1; cf. Rom 8:31, 33). God is the one who gives life and takes it away. But if death is the wages of sin (Rom 6:23), and if Satan can accuse a person of being a sinner, then their death can be properly expected as the consequence.

From Adam and Eve's fall onwards, human beings have lived under the shadow of death. In such a world, Satan uses illness and disaster to trouble God's people. This was how he tested Job (Job 1-2). Just like he asked God for permission to test Job, he also demanded to "sift like wheat" Simon Peter just before Jesus' passion, in an attempt to make his faith fail (Luke 22:31-32). Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' was a "messenger of Satan" (2 Cor 12:7). The Gospels show many people troubled with

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

, such as the woman bound by Satan for eighteen

The Gospel accounts also raise the spectre of demon-possession. Does the devil have the power to possess people's bodies or other spaces, for that matter? Is this what we see in the Gospel accounts of people troubled with demons? It is interesting to notice that, even though Jesus casts out demons, the language is more often that the person is 'with/in an unclean spirit' (e.g. Mark 1:23) troubled with or by this spirit.

In fairly recent times, an expansive role has been given to demons in charismatic circles. From Paul's warning not to "give the devil a foothold" through sinful anger in the congregation (Eph 4:27 NIV), a strange teaching has been derived and has become rather widespread: that demons can gain a 'foothold' on the soul, even the soul of a Christian. What used to be an emotion is now spoken of with a capital letter, indicating the name of a troublesome demon (Anger, Depression, Guilt). What used to be considered as sins have received the same treatment, now transmogrified into demons (Lust, Adultery, Pride, Lies). As such demons 'cling to the soul', it is not said to be full-blown 'possession', but still some kind of demonization. Reluctant to call for 'exorcism', those in this camp are still clear that a person so afflicted needs to be 'delivered'. Such teaching creates fear in people. Struggling already with some kind of illness (e.g. depression) or sin, or simply just finding life not so easy, their difficulties are overlaid with a further cause of anxiety: now they learn that their problems are caused by demons. Any ministry that creates fear, rather than abolishing it, has little reason to be called a *Christian* ministry. The gospel of Christ removes our fears, by making us children of God.

Day-to-day distractions

The revision of sin into demons is not what Ephesians 4:7 is about at all. In the section of this letter speaking of congre-gational relationships, Paul urges the Ephesians to watch out for unrighteous anger, since it will cause relational harm amongst the brothers and sisters. This, in turn, will allow the devil an opportunity to spread further discord within the congregation, working directly against the unity that ought to be the prevailing mood. Don't let wrong behaviour do the devil's work, says Paul; instead, let's continue to work out in our practice the unity we have in Christ.

Although it is *not* about some kind of physical 'clinging to the soul' by demons, this verse does show that the devil can cause damage to Christian congregations. This is not by doing any spooky stuff, but simply by the very ordinary means of one person

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

encoun-ters with unclean spirits portrayed in the Gospels, the devil does most of his more powerful work through rather ordinary means.

In Jesus' parable of the weeds, the devil sows the weeds (Matt 13:24-43), that is, he places his people amongst Jesus' people. Perhaps Ananias and Sapphira are two examples (Acts 5:3), or the immoral man within the Corinthian church (1 Cor 5:1-5), or those insincere liars whose consciences are seared, who teach the doctrines of demons (1 Tim 4:1).

It is interesting to notice how ordinary those "teachings of demons" actually are. They urge abstinence from certain foods and hinder marriage (1 Tim 4:3). The devil seems to have a particular interest in destroying marriage, from his work on the first married couple (Gen 3:1-6) to the destruction of marriage through intra-marital sexual abstinence and extra-marital sexual activity (1 Cor 7:5, 6:9-10, 13-18).

Despite the ghoulish persona given to the devil in movies and myths, he usually makes himself quite attractive. He can disguise himself as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14). Presumably in this guise, he offers what is attractive to human beings (Gen 3:5-6); all the glory of the kingdoms of this world (Luke 4:5-6), the deceitful lure of wealth (Matt 13:22), and the appeal to human pride (1 Tim 3:6).

Working to shake the faith of Christ's people through ordinary processes of human life is a brilliant strategy. Poor old Peter was rebuked as Satan, simply for thinking like a human being (Mark 8:33). The devil works through human political, cultural, and economic systems just as easily as through false religion (Rev 13). By offering attractive and appealing ways of finding security in this world, he lures his victims to put their faith in something other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Human beings enter the snares and the slavery of the devil (2 Tim 2:26; Heb 2:14-15) in an attempt to find an answer to their fear of death and the deep anxiety that it provokes at our core.

Perhaps we can conclude this 'anatomy' with one significant stratagem that needs to be constantly underlined. The devil is 'anti-word', 'anti-gospel'. In the parable of the sower, Jesus warned that the devil snatches away the gospel word almost as soon as it is spoken (Mark 4:15). The first temptation consisted of questioning, doubting, and denying what God had said (Gen 3:1–5). Good things which can be set apart for our good through prayer and the word of God, such as food and marriage, are denied, distorted and hindered by the "teachings of demons" (1 Tim 4:1-2). In particular, the word of the gospel whispering that the sinner is justified in Christ can be questioned, doubted, or denied (Rom 8:31-34).

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

one day. On the other side of the ledger, it is worth listing some of the things the devil can not do. He may accuse, but this will come to nothing, for God himself is for us (Rom 8:31) and Jesus has justified us and now intercedes for us (Rom 8:33-34). Just like Jesus prayed for Peter after Satan's demands to sift him (Luke 22:32), he also prayed for us those who would believe through the apostles. Before he went to the cross, he prayed, not that we would be taken out of the world, but that we might be kept from 'the evil one' (John 17:15). Now that Jesus has risen from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the father, he intercedes for all his people, which means that no-one (not even the devil) can accuse us any more (Rom 8:34).

If no-one can snatch us out of the Father's hand (John 10:29), then the devil can't either, and our salvation is secure in Christ's work and under the Father's protection. In the meantime, it is also of comfort to know that the devil cannot do anything to us without God's permission. Even the terrible suffering he caused Job had to be permitted by God first (Job 1-2). The betrayal of Jesus by Satan working through Judas (Luke 22:3) likewise was according to God's plan (Acts 2:23). If he can't act without God's permission, that means we can always speak to our heavenly Father to request that permission is not granted! "Deliver us from evil" refers literally to 'the evil one' (Matt 6:13).

The cross was the devil's great defeat, where Christ cast him out (John 12:31). And this great victory was not through some head-to-head struggle, 'God vs. Satan'. It was won indirectly. Jesus died as a sacrifice, bearing the just penalty for our sins. Now that Christ has died for us, Satan has no grounds to accuse us anymore, and so his power is gone! He may rage a little more at Christ's people, knowing that his time is short (Rev 12:12), but he will be totally ineffective, because the Lord Jesus has already neutralized him.

Resistance through submission

Having surveyed much of what the Bible says in its 'peripheral vision' about the devil's manner of working, we may have to admit it was an unnecessary exercise. The thing is, we don't really need to know about the devil's schemes, or strategies, or how he works. It may be interesting, perhaps slightly helpful, but is certainly *not* essential.

We don't really need to know about his schemes and designs, whatever they might be, because we have already been equipped with superior weaponry. We are not told to know about him, to study him, to learn from him. This would be giving him too much attention. Instead, we are to know our Lord and put on the strength that

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

s positive end of the equation, then the devil will ted foe that he is.

We are never called to engage with the devil (or with demons) directly. There is no call for anyone to engage in exorcism or deliverance ministries. Christian ministry is always the same. It is about the word of God and prayer. That is it. We don't get information from the devil, we continue to believe the gospel word. We don't speak to the devil, we speak to our heavenly Father.

We began by noting the commands to resist the devil, which bring the call to be wary of him. But notice how easy that is: if we resist, the promise is that "he will flee from you" (Jas 4:7). We should also notice that, in the same verse, the negative command to resist the devil is secondary to the positive command to "submit yourselves therefore to God". Rather than focusing upon resisting the devil, we should be caught up with submitting ourselves to God, and the resistance will duly follow.

When Paul speaks of the need to 'struggle' with hostile spiritual forces, he uses a term not primarily drawn from warfare, but from athletic contests (Eph 6:12). He mixes his metaphors a little, however, because he urges his readers to put on the whole armour of God (Eph 6:11). Rather than needing to know about the strategies of the enemy, what the Christian needs to know is how good his armour is! God's strength, truth, righteousness, gospel of peace, faith, salvation, word of God, prayer, alertness, boldness… the victory of Christ is so secure that, clothed in this armour, you will be able to stand against the devil's schemes, no matter what form they might take.

Satan was enraged when Christ defeated him on the cross (Rev 12:12). When this toothless tiger realizes just how much Christ has protected his people, that must tease him all the more!

Resist. Stand firm. Tease on.

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

you to be sick?

(Article from "The Briefing" Issue 338 Nov 2006, Matthias Media. Used with permission. Copyright.)

(Does God want us to be sick or doesn't he: yes or no? John Chapman argues that neither answer is satisfactory.)

I live in a retirement village. I enjoy life there with new friends and great Christian fellowship. Each Sunday afternoon we have a church service at 5 pm. In December, we had a preacher who posed the question to us: "Does God want us to be sick?"

He was preaching on the Acts of the Apostles and, in particular, on the person of Stephen (Acts 6:8-10). He rightly pointed out that Stephen was not only filled with the Spirit, but also performed "great wonders and miraculous signs" (NIV). He asked us to ponder whether this was because Stephen was a special case, or whether we should expect to see miracles at the hand of God today.

This challenged me. It challenged me not to limit God's power to my rationality. Being a child of the Enlightenment, I am tempted to think that God is unlikely to do anything beyond the norm, and I was glad to be reminded that God could do exceedingly more abundantly than anything I could ask or even imagine.

The preacher then urged us to believe that God could and would heal us. I should point out that the average age of those listening to him was about 78, and that (according to my quick calculation) we had collectively taken at least 500 pills that morning to get us started and another 300 at lunch time to keep us going and would require at least 200 more to knock us out before the end of the day. The miracle was that any of us were alive, not whether we had or would be healed.

That being said, does God want us to be sick or doesn't he? The preacher gave a resounding "No!" However that answer is too simplistic to deal with the reality of the world in which we are called to live. The answer should have been: "No and maybe". Because of the fall, we cannot give a 'Yes' or 'No' answer. The situation is too complex for that. Genesis chapter 2 ends with everything in the garden being lovely. Adam and Eve are in perfect harmony with God and each other and their environment. By the time we get to the end of chapter 3, all this has changed. The man and the woman are no longer at harmony with each other but are threatened by each other. They are out of harmony with God, and they try to hide from him. They are threatened by their environment. Life is hard and work is burdensome. What has gone wrong?

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

troduced to the Evil One in the form of the Serpent. e from or how he got there. He is opposed to God the woman, and he is hell-bent on destroying them.

For reasons best known to himself, God allowed into his plan for humanity that which was opposed to his character. The existence of the evil one in God's world did not take place outside of God's knowledge, since he knows everything. It did not take place outside his will, since his power is unlimited. So why did he do it? I don't think the Bible tells us the answer to this. It remains one of the fundamental mysteries in theology, and it is at the heart of the difficulty in giving a 'Yes' or 'No' answer to the question posed by the preacher.

'God's will' is a multi-faceted concept. It can mean God's unfolding plan for the world (as in Eph 1:11) or it can mean God's character and desires (as in 2 Pet 3:9). The context will tell you which aspect of God's will is meant. God has allowed sin into the world, and uses both good and evil to achieve his plans. Consequently, some events within the unfolding plan of God seem to be at variance with God's character.

Let me illustrate this by asking the question: "Did God want Judas to betray the Lord Jesus?" Because the question is ambiguous, we have difficulty answering. We want to say, "Yes and No". However if I re-phrase the question and ask, "Is the betrayal of the Lord Jesus a God-like action?" we can easily answer "No". If I restate it as: "Is it in God's plan for Judas to betray Jesus?" again we have no difficulty in answering "Yes".

This mingling of good and evil in the unfolding plans of God can be seen in the life of Joseph in the Old Testament (Gen 37-50). Joseph is a man much sinned against. His brothers want to murder him. They sell him into slavery. He is sinned against by Potiphar's wife. He is left languishing in prison. But ultimately he becomes Prime Minister of Egypt. When his brothers come to Egypt for food in time of famine, Joseph does not take vengeance on them. He sees the hand of God in it all and says, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gen 50:20).

Exactly the same can be observed in the death of the Lord Jesus. Judas sins against the Lord Jesus, as do the Chief Priests, and the people. Yet all this was according to the definite plan and fore- knowledge of God (Acts 2:23).

It is worth noting that sin is sin, and is never excused. Yet it does not prevent God from achieving his purposes, and is used by God in achieving these purposes.

To return to the question of sickness: we know that ultimately, in the New Creation,

Your complimentary use period has ended. Thank you for using PDF Complete.
Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features

that sense we can say, “God does not want us to be world, not the New Creation, and sin is not yet of this, it may well be in God’s plan for some of us to be sick. It may make us more Christ-like. It may make others more Christ-like. And if it achieves these things it may well be allowed.

During the time of the sermon, my dear friend Michael Orpwood was suffering from a very aggressive cancer. Much prayer was offered for his healing. Each week he sent out a bulletin about how things were proceeding. These were very edifying. He constantly told of the out-pouring of love from his friends and especially from his church group. Each week he described what could only be described as imaginative acts of kindness. I considered these to be miracles in a very real way none of which would have happened if God had healed him immediately. God answered our prayers negatively and Michael died in late December.

In every church of which I have been a member during my 50+ years as a Christian, I have seen wonderful healings of our members as a direct result of prayer. Equally, I have seen our members die, even though the same sorts of prayers were offered. We know that this is true to life and true to the Scriptures. Romans 8:22-23 tells us that the “whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

No matter how godly we are and how much we trust God, whilst ever we are in this fallen world, we will be subject to the fallen-ness of it. We will grow old. Our body parts will fail and we will finally die. Yet this is not the end! God will restore us in the New Creation when Jesus returns.

In that world, God will do away with all physical disability. Our bodies will be redeemed, and we will obtain the glorious freedom of the children of God (Romans 8:20-23).